

The World Wars and the Attempts to Promote World Peace



During the first half of the 20th century, causing immense destruction to life and property the whole world embarked on two world wars. Due to the devastation caused by these wars attempts were made to prevent another world war and to preserve world peace. The objective of this unit is to explain through past events the horrors of war and the importance of maintaining peace.

The First World War

During the first half of the 20th century two destructive wars took place. The first lasted for four years from the 28th of July 1914 to the 11th of November 1918. Though the immediate causes of the war arose in Europe, later the war spread to the colonies which the European nations had established. Subsequently the United States of America too joined in the war. Thus, finally the war spread to all the continents and it became a great world war. Before the 20th century, the wars which resulted from the relationships between the countries of Europe, were limited to Europe. However this war which broke out among the European countries in the 20th century, spread across the whole world and hence it is called the First World War.

The causes that led to the First World War

Though the first world war occurred during the beginning of the twentieth century, the reasons for it were gathering momentum from the latter part of the nineteenth century. Accordingly a number of causes that led to the First World War can be stated.

- ✿ The Alsace- Lorraine problem
- ✿ Bismarck's policy of alliances
- ✿ The Competition for colonies
- ✿ The situation in Eastern Europe
- ✿ The imperialistic policy of Germany
- ✿ The division of Europe into two blocs
- ✿ The Sarajevo incident

The Alsace - Lorraine problem

In 1871, a new state called Germany was founded by uniting regions which had been divided into a number of small states throughout history. The war that took place between France and Germany in the course of the unification of Germany, was won by Germany. As a result the Alsace-Lorraine region which is rich in iron and coal was annexed by Germany. This was a great loss to France. Hence France developed an antagonistic attitude towards Germany. Therefore France aimed at revenge against Germany and wresting Alsace-Lorraine from her.

However, it was Germany's intention to retain these regions at any cost. The contradictory goals of France and Germany which arose due to the Alsace- Lorraine problem, led to the division of Europe into two blocs in 1871, with France and Germany heading the two blocs.

Bismarck's Policy of alliances

Otto Von Bismarck who was the mastermind of German unification and a clever statesman followed a shrewd policy to safeguard the newly founded Germany. His tactic was to isolate France in Europe, so that France would not be able to make friends and rise against Germany. At the same time he took steps to develop relations with a few European friends to strengthen Germany. Through this he was able to make Germany the nucleus of the diplomatic relationships that were made.



Figure 4.1 Otto Von Bismarck

Bismarck whose objective was to make his scheme a success, began to steer international affairs and entered on a new system of alliances.

As the first step, in 1873 he formed the 'League of the three Emperors' with Russia, Austria and Germany. Though Russia left the alliance in a short time Bismarck ensured that the friendship with Russia would remain. Later in 1879, he entered into a military alliance with Austria, known as the Dual Alliance and in 1882, when Italy too became a partner, it was known as the 'Alliance of the Central European Powers.'

By this time Britain was following a policy of 'isolation' without any direct involvement in the affairs of Europe. On the surface, it seemed that Bismarck's scheme had succeeded. He had blocked France from making any friends.

Bismarck had cleverly instigated this system of alliances which led to the division of Europe into two camps. However in 1890, with the removal of Bismarck from power the rulers of Germany were unable to maintain these alliances diplomatically. As a result it paved the way for France, to secure friends and build up a powerful camp. Thus by the beginning of the first decade of the twentieth century, due to Bismarck's system of alliances, Europe was divided into two opposing blocks.

The competition for colonies

By the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the European countries had become industrialised, and had joined in the quest for markets for their finished products and for securing raw materials. Hence the race for colonies among almost all the European countries escalated. Among these countries it was Britain which had established the largest number of colonies in the Asian and African region. Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain and Holland also possessed colonies. After the unification of Germany, with the mineral resources obtained from the Alsace Lorraine region, Germany too had attained rapid industrial development. Therefore Germany was also desirous of finding markets for her finished products. The entry of Germany into Africa and Asia was a threat to Britain which was the dominant power until then. In addition Germany interferred in the problem over Morocco, between France and Spain. The controversy that had arisen between Russia and Japan over the acquisition of trade rights in China, and the controversy between France and Germany over the colonies in North Africa, had led to suspicions between the European states at this time. Hence the competition for colonies led to the nurturing of hostile feelings between the powers of the opposing camps.

The situation in Eastern Europe

A number of different ethnic groups existed within the Balkan states of Bulgaria, Serbia and Rumania. Due to the conflicts and hostility between the communities in each of these countries, there was constant internal confusion. Therefore Austria, France and Germany were observant of the moves of Russia who was trying to spread into the Balkan region.

As the Slavs, Serbians, Greeks and Bulgarians who were under the Austrian and Turkish Empires were not permitted to rise as independent nations, there existed in these regions, an environment which could lead to war at any time. The assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne at Sarajevo, the immediate cause of the First World War took place in Eastern Europe which had a tense political situation. Accordingly the escalation of the causes that led to the First World War were influenced by the chaotic political condition in Eastern Europe, and this led to the division of Europe into two camps.

The imperialistic policy of Germany

The imperialistic policy of Germany influenced the First World War in several ways. Bismarck knew that in building a strong German government it was necessary, according to the contemporary situation, to possess a number of colonies and a strong naval force. Bismarck had understood that embarking on such a course of action would be a challenge to Britain, which at the time had the largest empire and was in possession of the strongest fleet. Bismarck also knew that if Germany followed such a policy it would obstruct Germany's policy of keeping France isolated in Europe. Therefore he not only tactfully carried on the forming of alliances, but also avoided any activity that would be a challenge to Britain, and maintained friendly relations with Britain as far as possible.

However William II who became the Kaizer (emperor) of Germany in 1888, was unable to grasp Bismarck's diplomatic principles. The Kaiser's intention was to make Germany a vast empire within a short time. As the first step in this policy he dismissed Bismarck. Then he began to carry on all the administrative affairs of state by himself. As a result of this, the Kaiser who became the centre of some international incidents, which led to the suspicion of the other powers and a challenge to Britain, took steps to strengthen Germany's naval power.

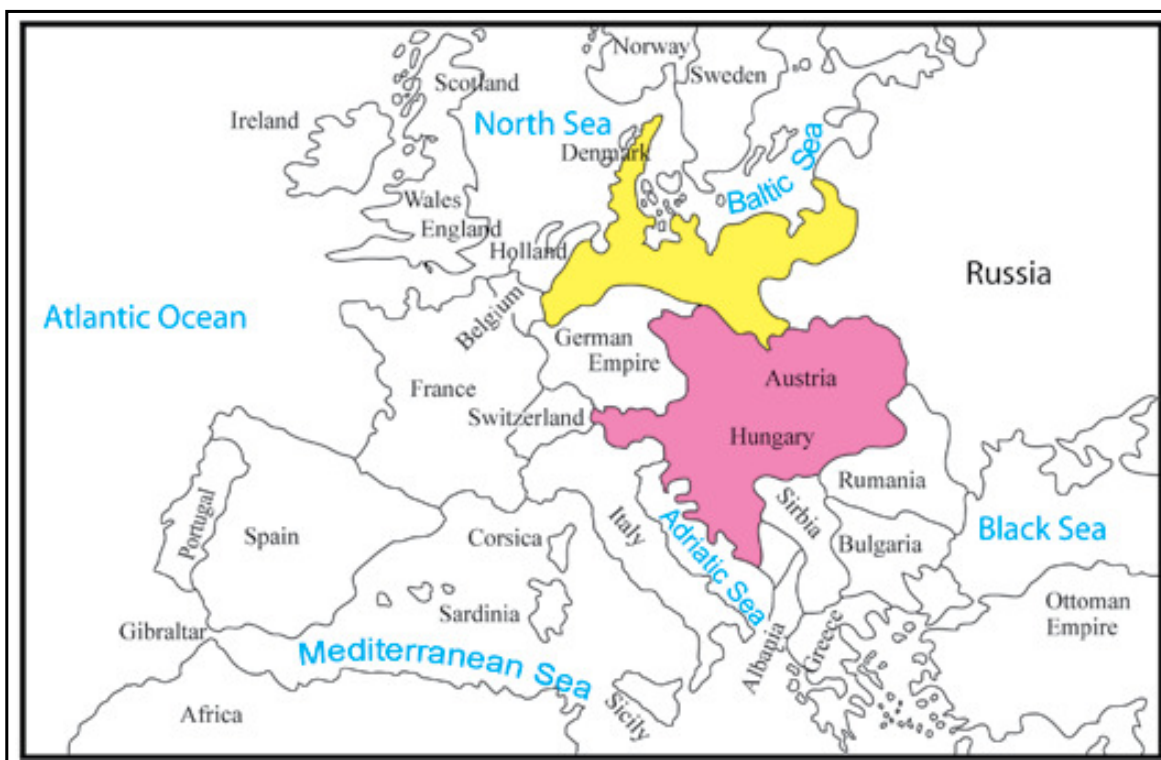
- ✱ In the war between France and Spain over Morocco, the Kaiser helped Spain to the disadvantage of France.
- ✱ Germany helped Turkey to build the Berlin Baghdad railway which ran through Asia Minor and Morocco to the Persian Gulf. Through this Germany envisaged the spreading of her power in Asia. The construction of a railway from Berlin to Baghdad was a threat to Britain's dominance in Asia, so it became a challenge to Britain too.
- ✱ The action taken by Germany to enhance the power of its navy was also a threat to Britain. In response, Britain too gave up its old fashioned ships and constructed powerful modern battle ships. Thus Britain as well as Germany began to construct such ships on a large scale.

- * In this way both countries displayed their naval power. This appeared to be a preparation for war. Britain, too which had followed a policy of isolation in Europe, began to think of winning over an ally. In this process she naturally turned to France, who was an enemy of Germany.
- * Britain joined France to carry on a naval protection plan. Accordingly Britain undertook to safeguard the North Sea.

The division of Europe into two blocs

The diplomatic policy that Bismarck followed in isolating France could not be successfully carried on by the rulers who came after him. Due to the activities of these rulers, Britain which had remained neutral so far too understood that Germany was becoming a threat and was compelled to look for allies. Thus defeating Bismarck's strategy the way was paved for France to seek friendship with Britain. In 1904, the Alliance of Friendship was signed between France and Britain. Later in 1907, with the entry of Russia it became the 'Triple Alliance'. Thus the division of Europe into two power blocs became one of the significant causes of the First World War. When the great powers divided themselves into two camps the other states joined one camp or the other according to their inclination. Thus the two camps were known as the Allied Powers and the Central European Powers.

The Sarajevo incident



Map 4.1 Europe in 1914

The incident that took place at Sarajevo was the immediate cause of the First World War. This was the assassination of the Crown Prince of Austria, Arch Duke Francis Ferdinand and his wife in the city of Sarajevo in Serbia, by Serbians. Austria which was antagonistic towards Serbia on account of border issues, implying that this incident was a conspiracy against her, claimed damages from Serbia, putting forward some conditions. However since Serbia did not comply, Austria declared war on Serbia, on 28th July 1914.

Austria's powerful ally Germany too approved the declaration of war and Serbia sought help from Russia. Russia refused Germany's request not to participate in the war and this made Germany declare war against Russia on August 1st. By this time, since there was a friendly alliance between France and Russia, Germany declared war on France too. In this manner, the conflicts that occurred in several places due to the suspicion and antagonism that had developed among the European nations for nearly 40 years, from the latter part of the nineteenth century, heightened and within about 50 days developed into a widespread war.



Figure 4.2 A German War Tank used in War

The main protagonists of the war

The First World War took place between the two power blocs, the Allied Powers and the Central European Powers, that had been formed by the main powers of Europe, by 1914.

The beginning and spread of the war

The first conflict in the First World War took place between Serbia and Austria. Then gradually their allies too joined in the war. Accordingly, Germany in order to help Austria and Russia and France to help Serbia, joined as participants in the war.

The Allied Powers - England, France, Russia, later joined by the United States of America.

Central European powers - Germany, Austria, Italy, Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary

At the beginning Britain did not join in the war. However when the German forces invaded Belgium, Britain could no longer keep aloof from the war. According to the understanding between Britain and France in 1912, safeguarding the North Sea was Britain's responsibility. Therefore on 04th August 1914, Great Britain declared war against Germany and became a party to the war. On 12th August, Great Britain declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire too. With the British Empire joining in the war, the intensity of the European war spread to most of the countries of the world, either directly or indirectly.

This was due to the fact that the British engaged military troops from their colonies for the war.

Italy which was at first a party to the bloc of the Central Powers, remained neutral with the beginning of the war. However Italy joined the Allied Powers through a secret pact. Italy changed sides and joined the war with the intention of securing some regions for the country. Thus in May 1915, Italy declared war against the Austro - Hungarian Empire.

Though the German forces and the forces of the allied powers fought long battles using the most modern weapons of war, neither side achieved the successes they expected, and so both parties continued in their efforts to win new allies. As such Germany won over the Turkish Empire and Bulgaria, while the Allied Powers led by Britain added Portugal and Japan to their camp, apart from Italy. The Japanese naval force captured the district of Kyoto and the Shantung Peninsula in China, which was under Germany.

The land battles and the naval battles that took place between the two parties heightened the war effort. One important feature of the war was Germany's attempt to prevent the supply not only of military weapons but also essential food items from reaching Britain. Germany declared that they would wage 'unrestricted' warfare on allied vessels carrying goods to Britain and accelerated their attacks on these ships. As a result one out of every four ships loaded from British ports was subject to submarine attacks.

Student Activity

List the European countries that divided into two blocs before the first world war

The United States of America (U.S.A) joins as a main party to the war.

The sinking of the British liner, 'Lusitania', in which a group of American passengers too were travelling by a German submarine attack, provoked the U.S.A. into getting involved in the war. The U.S.A. which had proclaimed that it would be a neutral state made great profits by selling military weapons, food and clothes to both

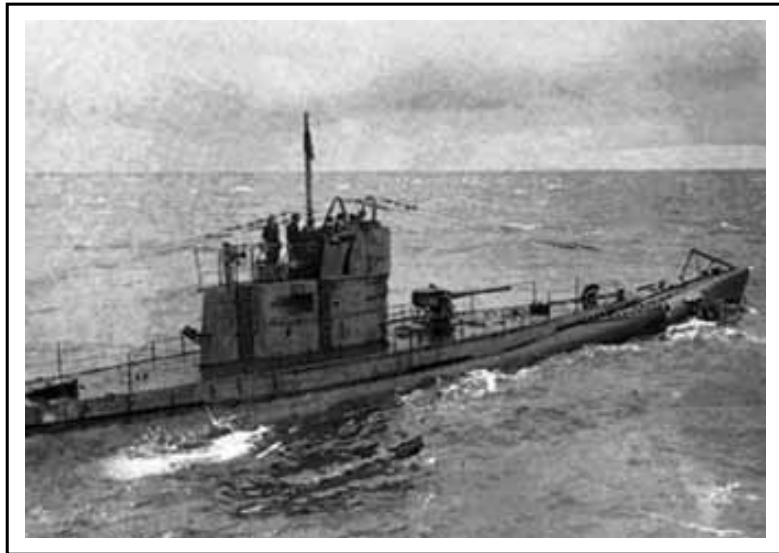


Figure 4.3 A German War Ship

parties during the war. However after the sinking of the 'Lusitania', the U.S.A. declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917.

The course of the war changed in many ways with the U.S.A. entering the war.

The propaganda campaign launched by the Americans brought together world opinion against the Central European Powers. The statement, 'that the world should be a place, which safeguards democracy based on popular will and not on the will of the despotic rulers' evoked sentiments of peace in the minds of people who were tired of war.

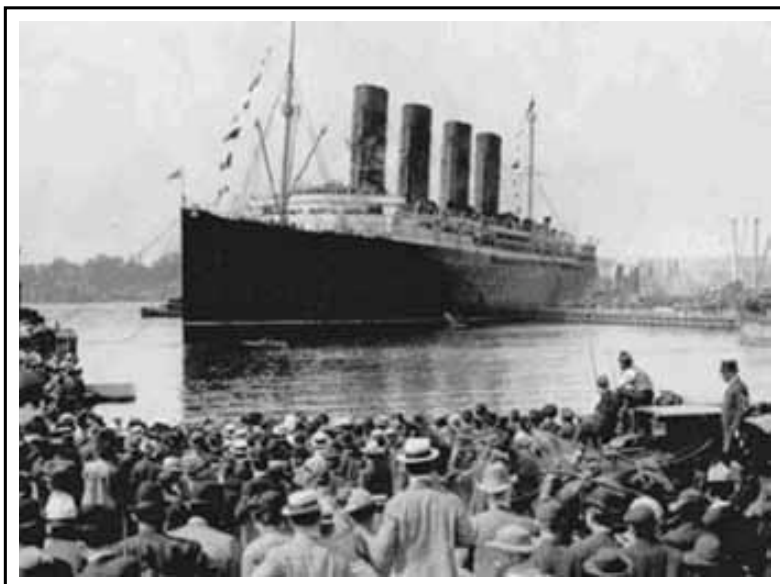


Figure 4.4 The Ship 'Lusitania'

The Results of the War

- ✧ The most important result of the war was the defeat of the Central European Powers and the victory of the Allied Powers. Apart from that, it brought upon the world a number of catastrophic results.
- ✧ The extensive loss of human life and property
- ✧ In this war instead of face to face combat, scientific and technological warfare ensued. As a result villages, urban areas, plantations, factories and communication systems were damaged on a large scale.
- ✧ America earned a great wealth during the war. America initiated the process of becoming the world's greatest power, by accumulating wealth and mustering power and strength, from the time of the First World War.
- ✧ Germany was considered the guilty party and severely punished by the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28th 1919. Though the treaty was forced on Germany, she did not have the strength to protest against it.
- ✧ A number of despotic monarchies that existed in Europe collapsed and a number of new states emerged. The German, Austria-Hungarian and Turkish Empires fell. Their totalitarian rule was ended. Instead of these, there arose new states such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Rumania and Yugoslavia based on the principle of nationality.
- ✧ While the First World War was raging, in 1917, the defeat of Russia led to the Bolshevik Revolution, against the corrupt and despotic Czar. With the victory of the revolution, a socialist state named Soviet Russia was born.
- ✧ The League of Nations was formed to protect world peace and democracy.
- ✧ The names of a few ancient states and cities were changed.
Eg: Mesopotamia became Iraq.
Constantinople became Istanbul.



Map 4.2 Europe after the First World War I

Student Activities

- * Mark on a map of the world the countries that took part in the First World War.
- * ‘A war brings about disaster.’ Examine this statement with reference to the First World War.

The League of Nations and World Peace

After the First World War the need for an international organisation to preserve world peace became evident. The President of the United States of America, Woodrow Wilson took the initiative in this regard.

The objectives of the formation of the League of Nations,

- ❖ To settle disputes between nations through discussion
- ❖ To prevent invasion by imposing economic sanctions
- ❖ To take other steps for the peaceful existence of nations
- ❖ To build international cooperation and understanding
- ❖ To protect the freedom and independence of small states

The efforts of the League of Nations to maintain peace

- * The League was able to prevent the recurrence of war for about twenty years from the time it was formed.
- * The League of Nations was able to solve the following crises and prevent the outbreak of war.
 - a) In 1921, the dispute which arose between Sweden and Finland over the Allende islands,
 - b) The dispute between Germany and Poland over Silesia,
 - c) The conflict between Greece and Bulgaria in 1925,
 - d) The dispute between Iran and Turkey over the Mosul oil fields in 1926,
- * The solving of the conflict between Greece and Italy by acting as a mediator and the prevention of war between Yugoslavia and Albania are the achievements of the League of Nations.
- * The League was also able to successfully supervise the administrative affairs of the colonies which had been brought under the League by the 'mandate system'
- * Austria, Hungary and Greece were provided economic aid, and refugees were rehabilitated. The League of Nations also succeeded in controlling the diseases that broke out after the war, and curbing the illegal slave trade and sale of narcotics.

The reasons for the failure of the League of Nations

- * Though the United States of America which played a leading role in creating the League of Nations, had become a world power after the world war, it was not a member of the League of Nations. This situation was one of the main reasons for the failure of this league. President Wilson was unable to make the United States of America a member due to the fact that the American Congress did not agree with some of the terms of the League of Nations.
- * Although fifty-five nations were included in the membership list of the League of Nations, Germany which was considered the 'guilty party' in the First World War and Russia which held revolutionary ideas, which differed from other countries were not given membership. Therefore depriving membership to several nations which ruled over a great part of the world, and a substantive area of the land of the earth, was a grave crisis, which the League of Nations faced from its inception.
- * The lack of military strength to be used when required to prevent the member states from resorting to aggression on other states, was also a reason for the failure of the League.

Examples. When Italy attacked Abyssinia, the League imposed sanctions against Italy but the great powers did not help the League against Italy.

- * When in 1931, Japan attacked Manchuria defying the League's instructions.
- * According to the constitution of the League all the members of the executive committee had to be unanimous in their decisions. To achieve such unanimity was extremely difficult. Hence even the constitution of this organisation was a cause of its failure.
- * Though it was expected to safeguard world peace collectively, no country was willing to spend its money or time on this.
- * Each country had pledged to muster armaments sufficient only to maintain its internal security. Though there was a proposal to appoint a Disarmament Committee, the Committee was never appointed.
- * In this way the League of Nations, had from its inception features which would make it unsuccessful.

Student Activity

‘The attempt made by the League of Nations to preserve world peace failed.’ Prepare a note containing facts for and against this statement.

The Rise of Fascism and Nazism

Fascism and Nazism were two doctrines which had despotic rule as their basic concept.

In the period between the two world wars, Fascism spread in Italy under Benito Mussolini, and Nazism in Germany under Adolf Hitler. The political concepts on which both theories were based are commonly regarded as tyrannical. Their basic characteristic is armed aggression.

Fascism and Nazism were two dogmas which emerged to counter the political concepts of Liberalism and Communism. In building up their philosophy, Fascists and Nazis saw to it that it would appeal to various social groups directly opposed to each other, who could be incorporated into their campaign. Such social groups were farmers, land owners, small traders, large industrialists, paid workers and daily paid workers who were vastly different from one another.

The countries which were actively involved in the First World War were undergoing great economic hardships. The people were faced with untold hardships. Therefore the confidence in democratically elected governments had dwindled and the people were keen on establishing a form of government that would help to resolve the problems that had arisen, irrespective of the manner in which it worked.

Accordingly after the First World War, a background had been created for Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany to spread aggressively. These parties organised themselves as political parties with a clear ideology and strict discipline and gradually developed into an arbitrary dictatorship under the strong authoritarianism of the party and the leader.

Fascism in Italy

Under Mussolini in Italy, the importance of implementing the main features of Fascist thought was highlighted. It implied that, it was not theory or speech but discipline and action were the most essential. Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy after the First World War, when Italy too was in a state of turmoil.

He formed the Fascist Party in 1921. The Fascist Party was a nationalist party. He criticised Communism vehemently in his newspaper and through this he increased the number of people loyal to him. Industrialists and landowners were among those who supported Mussolini's party. Those who sought membership in his party were thugs and youth who were disgruntled by unemployment. They were known as the Black Shirt Brigade, and carried batons in their hands giving an impression of power and authority. They devastated the trade union offices of those who were opposed to Mussolini.

Government officials did not raise objections to Mussolini as they were being threatened by the Communists. Popular programmes such as the eradication of unemployment, improving the working conditions of workers, giving land to the landless farmers and protection of private property and enterprises were introduced.

However in the first election he could win only a few seats in the House of Representatives. Mussolini had a genuine desire to establish a strong government in Italy and obtain a rightful position for Italy in the world. However the election results disheartened Mussolini. Mussolini who became restless after this asked for another election to be held. His request was refused. Therefore he demanded that the government be handed over to him and threatened to seize Rome through demonstrations.



Figure 4.5 Benito Musolini and Adolf Hitler

The Italian state did not heed his threat and was surprised when the Black Shirts surrounded Rome. Therefore king Victor Emmanuel dissolved the government and invited Mussolini to appoint a cabinet.

By gradually spreading the Fascist ideologies such as giving divine status to the state and ruler, denying fundamental rights, emphasizing the responsibilities of citizens and constant loyalty to the state and rulers he established a dictatorship.

Mussolini who appointed his associates to all the key positions in the government, suppressed all opposition against him through intimidation and violence. He employed his Black Shirts to influence the voters and by suppressing the newspapers he crushed his opponents. Having won the majority of seats in the parliament in this way, he suppressed all other parties in Italy, and made his party the only legitimate one. Therefore he was able to win the 1929 election completely. He eliminated all the forces that were against him.

By the Latern Pact, which he made with the Pope, Mussolini was able to gain the support of the people as well as win over the Pope. The majority of the people of Italy were staunch Catholics. Catholicism was reorganised as the state religion and teaching of religion was made compulsory in all schools. From 1870, when Rome was freed from the rule of the Pope, the relation between the Pope and the state had lessened. However, by the pact that was arrived at between Mussolini and the Pope, the Pope was regarded as the ruler of the Vatican and a large amount was paid as compensation, in lieu of the regions that the Pope had lost. The Pope accepted Mussolini's government as a legitimate one, because of the benefits the Pope derived.

Steps taken by Mussolini to strengthen Italy economically

- Reducing government expenditure
- Removing excess staff
- Acquiring heavy taxes from the wealthy
- Prohibiting strikes and trade union action
- Taking action to win over industrialists and workers
- Increasing production in factories
- Legalising an 8- hour working day in factories
- Establishing an insurance scheme for workers' insurance
- Construction of railways, building a fleet of cargo vessels, creating new jobs by undertaking projects such as the reclamation of land
- Developing the tourist industry

With Mussolini's multi-purpose programme, a certain amount of economic benefits were derived, but with the economic depression of 1929, it became unsuccessful. Mussolini's next step was to gain greatness for Italy through war. Accordingly nationalism and war were held in high esteem.

He initiated a publicity campaign to prepare the background for war and made war-service compulsory for the youth. He attacked Ethiopia and annexed it. In 1940, he joined the power bloc headed by Japan and Germany and thus entered the Second World War.

However, in this war Italy had to face a number of unfortunate defeats. As a result she lost all her colonies and the island of Sicily. Therefore the Fascists' anger was vented towards their leader and he escaped to North Italy. However in 1945 with the defeat of Germany, the Italians who captured Mussolini, killed him in the city of Milan.

Nazism in Germany

After the First World War Germany was brought under the Weimar Republic. It lasted for about 14 years. At this time, due to economic inflation, unemployment and food shortages, Germany faced many hardships. In addition, the indemnity, that had to be paid to the allied powers was a burden too. Since the Treaty of Versailles had been forced on Germany undermining her prestige, Germany was intent on nullifying the treaty at any cost.

Nazism

- * This was a philosophy which was opposed to Democracy, Communism and Capitalism and its basic teaching was that the German race was the descendent of pure Aryans and the most superior human race.
- * Despising the jews was a special feature of Nazism. Hitler's book 'Mien Kampf' or 'My Fight' describes Nazism.
- * Destroying opponents, collecting information through the secret army and conspiracy are features of this philosophy.
- * The leader of the state was identified as the soul of the nation.
- * The leader should have unlimited powers and that the economic system, should be strictly controlled by the government, were the other main principles of the Nazi party.

Nazism is a system of dictatorial government that sprang up in Germany, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler after the First World War.

Hitler's Rise to Power

Against the background of the many problems such as reparation, poverty, unemployment, food scarcity, Hitler got the opportunity to come to power in the guise of following a national socialist policy. He obtained the membership of the German Labour Party which was a small Socialist Party. He changed the name of the party



Figure 4.6 Hitler

to National Socialist Labour Party. (Nazi) Its philosophy became known as Nazism. This party had an armed group dressed in brown shirts and a secret army detachment known as SS.

He established a permanent headquarters and launched an official newspaper called the National Observer. Hitler who had been imprisoned for conspirating wrote a book titled 'Mien Kampf' while in prison. This is translated as 'My Fight'. This was a handbook of Nazism. Hitler who was a powerful orator, was able to attract the attention of the people by addressing meetings. Through his speeches he aroused a fear of the Communist regime, and convinced the people of the need for a strong government. Hitler named the Treaty of Versailles, the Jews, the Marxists, war and inflation as the enemy of the nation. His aim was also to regain the territory lost in the First World War.

Though the map of Europe was drawn creating certain states on the basis of the principle of nationality, people of German nationality were spread in large numbers in various countries. Hitler viewed this as ignoring German nationality. Bringing forward the notion of the greatness of the Aryan race to the forefront, he proclaimed the flag with the Swastika symbol as the flag of Germany. He believed that all the Germans in the



Figure 4.7 The German flag with the 'Swastika' symbol.

whole of Europe should be united in Germany. At the same time he declared himself as the Third Emperor of Germany.

In 1930, Hitler came forward as a candidate at the presidential election, but he was not successful. In 1932, he began a second election campaign. He organised gigantic banners and flags which had the words, “Hitler for Germany” and displayed them.



Jews who were killed

Even in this election his party could not win a majority of seats. However, in January 1933, Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany. Thereafter, a fresh election was held in March 1933. Communist leaders were arrested, all other political parties were proscribed, and a single party system was established. In 1934, he initiated a brutal system of government which terrorised the people. He engaged the secret police to eliminate all his opponents. He tortured and killed thousands of people who were arrested on suspicion. He abolished civil rights and prohibited free expression through the newspapers and radio. All institutions were brought under his control.

Hitlers nationlistic policy was one reason that led the world to a Second World War. This unique, cruel leader committed suicide when Germany surrendered to the Allied Powers.

The Second World War

The war which spread throughout the world from September 1939 to August 1945, for six long years is known as the Second World War. This war which initially broke out between the countries of Europe gradually turned into a world war. Japan which was emerging as the main power in Asia, attacked an American fleet on 7th Decemeber 1941, and the war which was confined to Europe transformed into a world war.

The causes of the Second World War.

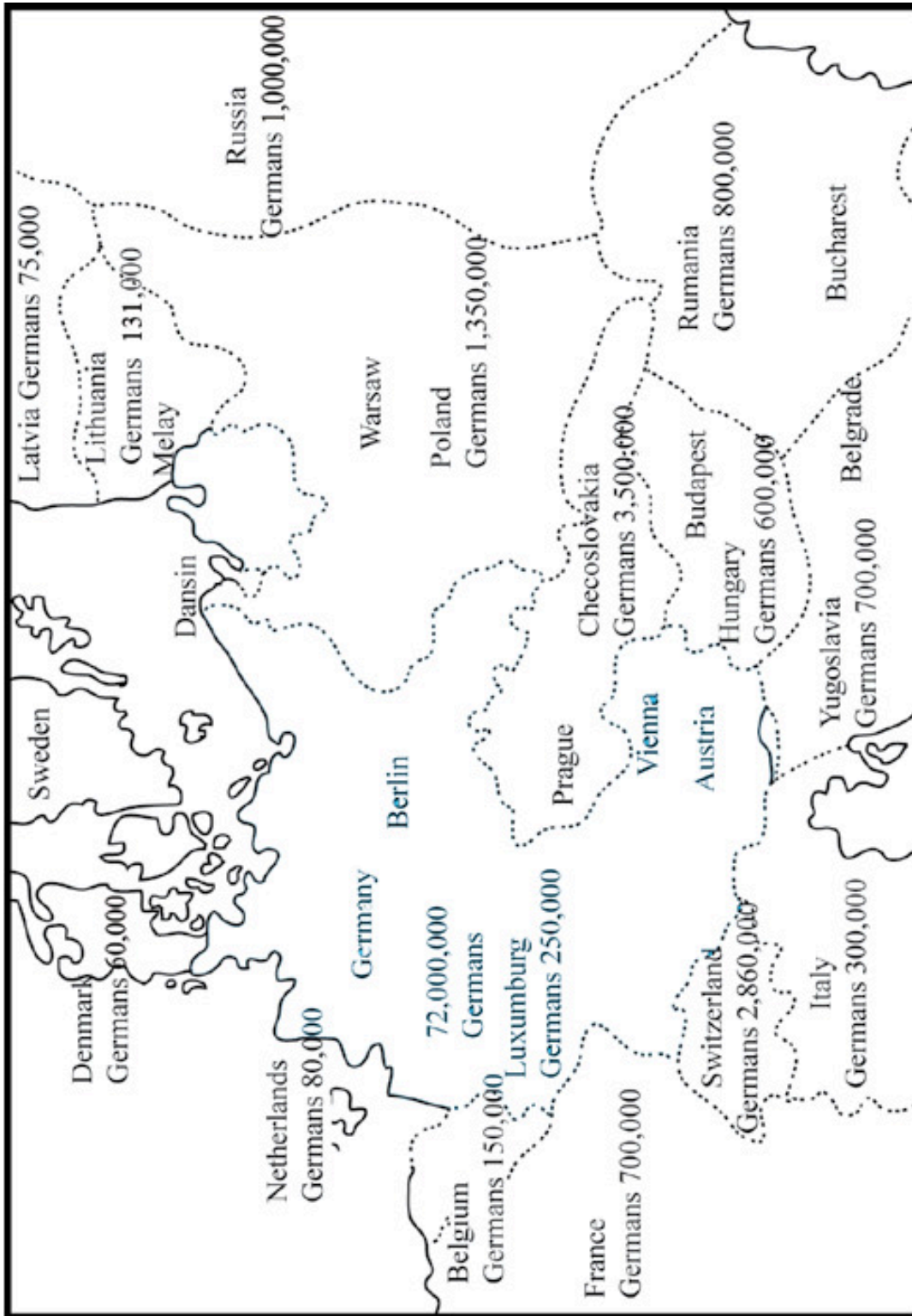
- * The rise of Hitler
- * Hitler's actions
- * Mussolini's actions in Italy
- * Japan's aggressive policy
- * The weakness of the League of Nations

These and other factors created the background to the Second World War. The immediate cause of the war was the invasion of Poland by Hitler.

Germany becomes powerful under Hitler

Germany was facing many crises, due to the Treaty of Versailles, which was forced on Germany after her crushing defeat, the Weimar Republic and the world economic depression of 1929. Every German had the feeling that the German nation had been subjected to humiliation and injustice, by the Treaty of Versailles. As a result of the treaty the German nation was scattered in several regions. For example: around 60 lakhs of Germans were in Austria, 30 lakhs in Czechoslovakia and a large number in Poland.

Due to these reasons Germany had become one of the poorest countries in Europe. Against this background the rise of the Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler occurred. Hitler who was a soldier, who fought for Germany in the First World War was able to understand the feelings and aspirations of the German people. He was an astute politician as well as a brilliant orator. Using these personality traits he worked towards arousing national sentiments in the German nation. He appealed for the support of the people to abrogate the Treaty of Versailles and restore Germany to the status it had prior to 1914.



Map 4.3 THE DIVISION OF GERMANY INTO SEVERAL REGIONS

This was a powerful and moving message to the Germans who had developed a hatred towards the victorious nations. The Germans who were gripped by Hitler's political speeches began to rally round him. He got unstinted support from the army too. Hitler who had become the German Chancellor in 1933, became the President after the death of President Hindenberg. From then on he implemented his policies and proceeded to eliminate his enemies. For this purpose he used the secret police called the Gestapo.

- ⊗ Hitler's intention was to build Germany as a powerful Empire. Accordingly he developed the agricultural and industrial sectors. He improved the infra-structure facilities such as main roads, railway lines and bridges and developed transport activities.
- ⊗ Hitler who embarked on a policy of extending the borders of Germany annexed the Rhineland in 1936. Hitler's attention was also drawn to Austria, where a large number of Germans lived.
- ⊗ By merging Austria and Germany Hitler increased the physical and human resources of Germany. Next he focussed his attention on Czechoslovakia. A large number of Germans lived in Sudetenland which was a part of Czechoslovakia and Hitler's idea was to annex this region too.

Hence Hitler declared that if the Sudetenland issue was not settled before September 1938, he would invade Czechoslovakia. According to the Munich Conference, an area of 11,000 square feet and 71% of the steel and iron-ore produced were to be given to Germany.

The Munich Conference :- Britain, France, Italy and Germany assembled at Munich on 29th September 1938, to find a solution to the German- Sudeten conflict. At this conference it was decided to give a part of Sudetenland to Germany.

On 15th March 1939, Germany abrogating all agreements including the Munich Agreement invaded Czechoslovakia and annexed it. Russia which feared that Hitler would attack her someday entered into an agreement with Hitler in 1939. While Germany was strengthening her power in this way, there were signs that the western nations opposed to Germany too were organising themselves.

Britain which feared that Hitler would next invade Poland, on the basis that a large number of Germans lived there, entered into an agreement with France and Turkey to face this threat. On 1st September 1939, Hitler attacked Poland. Hence Britain and France which had entered into an agreement to protect Poland declared war against Germany on September 03rd.

This invasion of Poland was the incident which occurred immediately before the war. Thereafter the flames of a horrifying war spread throughout the world.

Mussolini's activities in Italy

Italy which had the desire to build a great empire, made preparations to improve its military and naval power under Mussolini. In 1936 Mussolini attacked Ethiopia and annexed it. The attention of the other European nations was directed towards this emergence of Italy. However, no one came forward to oppose Mussolini's aggressive policies. Though the League of Nations imposed sanctions it could not undertake any practical action. Italy left the League of Nations and this was a sign that Mussolini would continue his aggressive policies stubbornly.

Japan's policy of aggression

Japan was another country which had reached a high level of development towards the end of the nineteenth century. As a result of the economic development thus achieved by Japan, the need to find markets for her manufactured products arose. Japan too wanted to build an Asian empire similar to that of the western empires. In order to achieve this she began a policy of annexing colonies, and in 1934, invaded Manchuria in North China. As the League of Nations named Japan the 'guilty party' in this incident, Japan left the League of Nations. Subsequently Japan captured some important ports and towns in China.

The failure of League of Nations

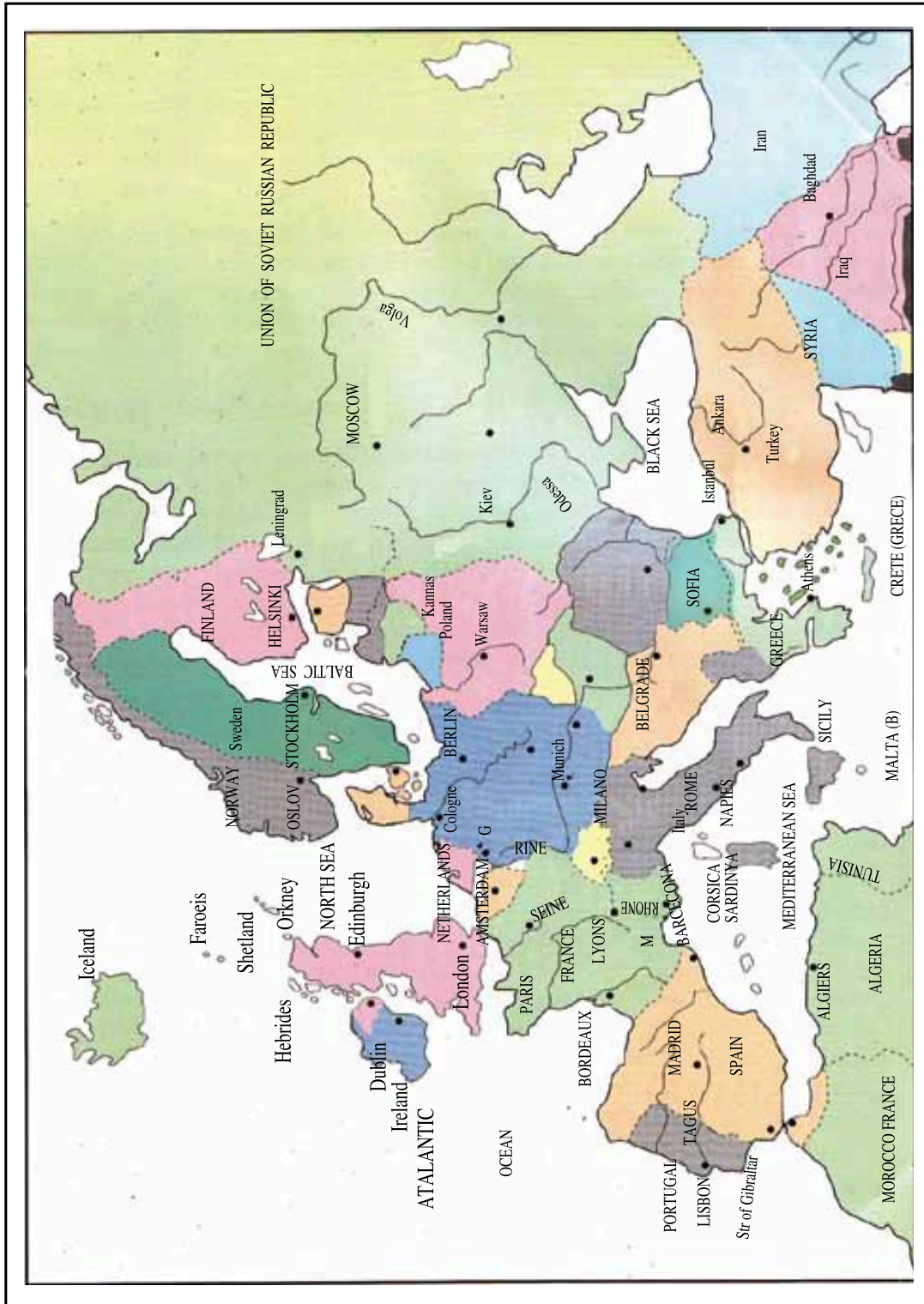
The European powers began to make alliances according to their needs and the countries such as Germany, Italy, Japan left the League of Nations. Therefore this made the League of Nations ineffective. The role of the league was weakened due to the fact that it had no military power to prevent the member states from resorting to aggressive activities.

The League of Nations was formed after the First World War to preserve peace, through a collective effect, but it failed in this attempt. Therefore individual nations entered into alliances with friendly powers and the inevitable consequence was the arming of the major powers leading to the Second World War. In this way the causes for the war accumulated and while the background was being prepared for war, the first gun was fired when Germany invaded Poland. This was the immediate event before the war broke out.



Figure 4.9 A Railway Station in devastated Poland

Thus when Japan entered this war which broke out in Europe, Asia was drawn in , and when the United States of America, joined in, America too became involved and it turned into a world war.



Map 4.4 Europe immediately before the Second world War

Parties to the war

The parties to the Second World War were twofold.

They were the Allies and the Axis Powers.

- ❖ **The Allies** : Britain, France, Russia and the United States of America.
- ❖ **The Axis Powers** : Germany, Italy, Japan, Hungary and Rumania.

The roles of the participants

By invading Poland on 1st of September 1939, it was Germany which took the first step in the Second World War. Germany attacked Poland using her air force. By declaring war against Germany, in order to protect Poland, Britain and France too joined in the Second World War.

Germany won this war and according to the pact signed between Germany and Russia, Poland was divided between these two countries.

Germany's next aim was to invade Denmark and Norway. Germany intended to capture Denmark because it was advanced in agriculture and thereby sufficient quantities of food items could be obtained from her. In the case of Norway, it was to get the ownership of iron ore deposits.



Figure 4.10 Winston Churchill

By subjugating Denmark and Norway Germany paved the way for using Norway's sea-ports and air force bases in the attacks against Britain.

In June 1940, Germany attacked France and entered Paris. The French government which did not possess the strength to defend Paris against the onslaught declared it an 'open city' in order to prevent it from being destroyed. Therefore Germany was able to subjugate France, without engaging in war. Meanwhile Italy too attacked France from the South in order to help Germany. Hence France which was helpless signed a peace treaty with Germany on 22nd June 1940. Through this treaty the French colonies and naval forces were handed over to the Germans.

Winston Churchill considered the defeat of France as a great blow to Britain and in order to face possible dangers in the future, he formed a wartime national government.

Churchill who strengthened his relationship with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, obtained air craft and naval craft, armaments and food stuffs, as well as loans from the U.S.A. In addition he formed a common war front against Germany, with the participation of the countries of the British Empire, namely, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and Ceylon.

Hitler's next target was Britain. He was successful in destroying British naval craft as well as trading vessels using submarines and high speed U boats. In June 1940, Germany began aiming its air attacks on Britain. Accordingly using their bombers, they bombed the harbour, airports and cities. To destroy the enemy bombers, Britain made use of their defenders and anti air-craft guns suspended in the sky by means of balloons and rods, which could be activated from the ground. In the fiercest battle which took place on the 14th of September 1940, Britain downed 56 German planes.

In these battles the countries of the British Commonwealth gave excellent support to Britain.



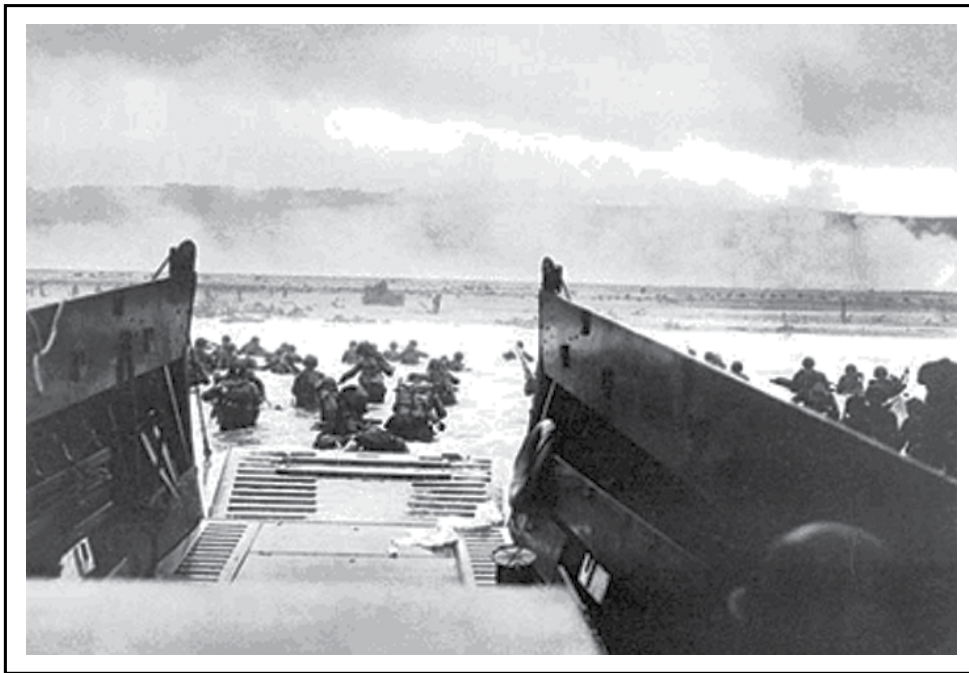
Figure 4.11 The allied forces bombed and destroyed an oil field in Rumania

Germany had won the loyalty of the countries Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria. However in Yugoslavia Marshal Tito, overturned the government which was friendly towards Germany and established a government that was loyal to the Allies led by Britain.

The Allies won the battles that took place in North Africa with the Axis powers. In these battles a large number of German soldiers were taken prisoners.

Hitler, who was desirous of making Germany an Empire, next focussed on Russia. The main objective of invading Russia was to gain possession of her cornfields and the oil deposits of the Caucasus and also to eradicate Communism.

Accordingly Germany's attack on Russia without any warning was the most decisive moment in the Second World War.



The allies land in France

The Russians set fire to their corn fields and destroyed the oil wells. In addition they made sure that the German armies would stay in Russia till the onset of the cold winter season. Hitler who had expected the Russian war to end quickly had not prepared the armies to face the winter.

The Germans had to face very harsh conditions due to the bitter cold. Their means of communication broke down. The Germans faced a shortage of food. Their armed tanks could not be operated due to the heavy snow. When the German soldiers began to die in large numbers, unable to bear the cold the Russian armies were able to rout the German armies. This paved the way for Soviet Russia to join Britain and the Allied Powers. When Russia was advancing in this way the Allies were launching a course of action to liberate France.

In the meantime the Russians moved towards Germany liberating the countries under nazi domination. Germany was surrounded by the British, French and American forces which were attacking from the west. The allied armies who arrived in Germany in March 1945, reached Berlin in May. Hitler and many of his commanders who realised how weak their position was, committed suicide. In May 1945, the Germans surrendered unconditionally.

At the time Japan which was working towards building an empire in Asia, came into conflict with Britain, France and America. The main obstacle to Japan, in this under taking was the American naval base situated in the Hawaiian Islands. Therefore on 07th December 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbour. Due to this incident, the Americans declared war against Japan on 08th December 1941, while Germany and Italy declared war on America in support of Japan.

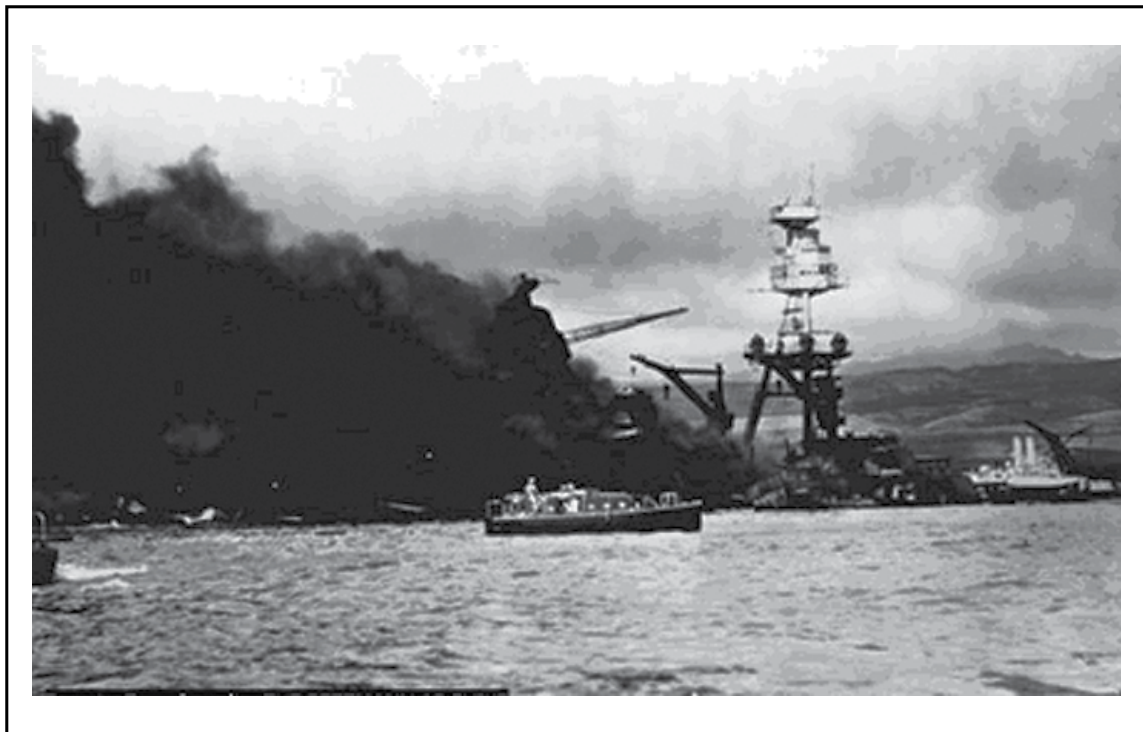


Figure 4.13 Attack on Pearl Harbour

On February 14th 1942, Singapore, the main stronghold of the British in the East was surrendered by the Japanese. Later, Japan captured the British colonies of Hong-Kong, Malaya and Burma, and the East Indian islands of Sumatra, Java and Borneo and the Phillipines and a number of other islands.

In this way, except for Sri Lanka and India, the whole of South and South East Asia came under the Japanese. The Japanese bombed Colombo on 05th April 1942, and Trincomalee on 07th April. Britain which feared that the Japanese armies would invade Sri Lanka had fortified her with British battalions. Accordingly, during the period 1942-1945 in order to protect the British Empire in the East, Sri Lanka was made a military base. In places, such as North East India and Burma, fierce battles took place between the Japanese and the Allied Powers. In 1944, the Americans set up military camps in the Phillipines.

Since Japan which was losing did not heed the last warning made by the allies, to surrender, Hiroshima was bombed on 06th August 1945 and Nagasaki on 9th August. As a result of this, over one hundred thousand were killed and a number in excess of that were injured. Atomic radiation affected even the generations that followed.

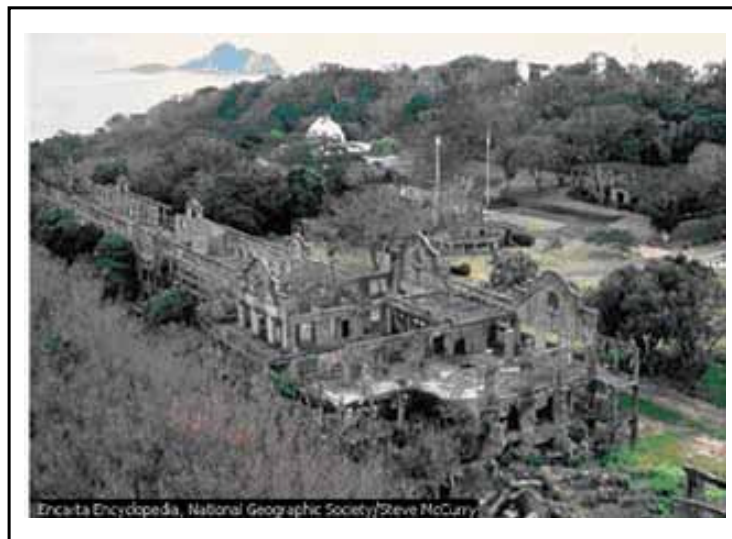


Figure 4.14 Ruins of Philippine bunkers

On witnessing this dreadful disaster, the Japanese Emperor, Hirohito, agreed to an unconditional surrender on August 14th 1945, even disregarding the advice of the Japanese generals. On September 2nd 1945, the documents of surrender were signed in the presence of General Mac Arthur on the battleship Missouri. This brought the Second World War to an end.

The U.S.A. which did not join in the war at first but made large profits by selling arms. later decided to join because of the victorious advance of Germany and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.



Figure 4.15 The plane which dropped the bombs



Figure 4.16 The destruction of Nagasaki

The results of the Second World War

- ◆ The Second World War was the fiercest war that has taken place so far in the world. The death toll was over million. A large number of cities in France, Germany, Italy and other countries were devastated.
- ◆ Germany was divided into two-the East and West. As it was decided to station the armies of allied powers in Germany, later, the Berlin Wall was erected. Germany was divided between the two power blocs as East and west.
- ◆ France and Britain which were the great world powers so far, lost their positions and U.S.A. and Soviet Russia emerged as super powers. The U.S.A. stood as the champion of Capitalism and Democracy and Soviet Russia as the champion of Communism and Socialism. Under the leadership of these two powers the division of the world into two camps commenced. (You can learn about these two power blocs and their activities in Chapter 5 of this book.)

◆ The United States of America, came forward to restore the defeated and destroyed European countries such as West Germany and also Japan. The aid programme which was undertaken in this respect was named Marshall Plan, in the name of John Marshall the Secretary of State at the time.

◆ Britain and France granted independence to their colonies.

Due to the Second World War the concept of imperialism collapsed. As a result the colonies under countries such as Britain and France gained independence.

Eg. Sri Lanka, India

◆ Another important result of the Second World War was the formation of the United Nations Organisation to protect world peace.

Student Activities

* ‘To win a war strategy is more important than military strength.’ Support this statement with reference to the Second World War.

* Collect pictures of the world wars and prepare a scrap book.

* Prepare an article for a wall newspaper titled, ‘The destruction caused by world war’ in relation to the two world wars.

The United Nations Organisation

As a result of the discussion held in Teheran by the three world leaders, Winston Churchill of Britain, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States of America and Joseph Stalin, the leader of Soviet Russia, a proposal was submitted to establish a world organisation, in order to maintain world peace. Accordingly its basic principles were drawn up at the 1945, San Francisco Conference. **The United Nations Organisation** was born on 24th October 1945, after its charter was ratified by 50 countries. Therefore October 24, has been named the United Nations Day.

According to the United Nations Charter among the objectives for which it was set up are:

- * To maintain international peace and security
- * To develop friendly relations among nations
- * To solve economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems
- * To obtain international cooperation in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms
- * To be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations in attaining these common ends

The Structure of the United Nations Organisation

The United Nations Organisation consists of six main organs. They are

1. The General Assembly
2. Security Council
3. Economic and Social Council
4. Trusteeship Council
5. International Court of Justice
6. The Secretariat

The headquarters of the United Nations is situated in New York and its branches are located in every capital in the world. Among them the office in Geneva performs an important role.

01. General Assembly

The main organ composed of representatives of all member states is the General Assembly. The regular session of this assembly is held in September each year. However there is provision for it to convene a special meeting at the request of the Security Council or of a majority of member states. In the assembly all members are represented on an equal basis. Each member state has one vote. According to the Principles of the United Nations the General Assembly can discuss and make recommendations on any issue. The main functions performed by this assembly are maintaining peace and making proposals regarding education, culture, society, economics and international issues. The General Assembly also appoints the Secretary -General on the recommendation of the Security Council, the judges of the International Court of Justice and admits new members to the organisation.

02. The Security Council

The Security Council consists of 15 members and 5 of them are permanent members. These 5 members are the United States of America, United Kingdom, France, Russia and China. The term of the other 10 members is limited to two years. All members of the United Nations Organisation are obliged to agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council.

03. Economic and Social Council

This council has 54 members who serve for three- year terms. Then a new council is elected.

The main objective of this council is fostering social and economic development of humanity through international cooperation.

This council makes use of a number of affiliated agencies to carry out its functions. Of these the important organisations are the International Labour Organisation (ILO), The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), International Monetary Fund(IMF), World Health Organisation(WHO) United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNITAD) General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT), and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.(IBRD).

04. Trusteeship Council

The main function of this Council is to administer the territories under the International Trusteeship of the United Nations. There were 7 trusteeship territories at the time of the establishment of the United Nations Organisation. Later independent Governments were formed in these states. In 1986, with the Pacific Islands establishing independent governments, the trusteeship status of nations came to an end.

05. International Court of Justice

Its main function is to provide legal advice to the various institutions in the United Nations Organisation. If necessary member states can submit to this court disputes which have arisen in their states, for settlement. The headquarters of this court is located at The Hague in the Netherlands. These judges are chosen from those who have held high positions in the legal system in their own countries and from specialists in International Law. The court is composed of 15 judges and their term of office is nine years.

06. Secretariat

The main administrative office of the United Nations Organisation is the Secretariat. The head of this office is the Secretary-General, who is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council, for a term of 5 years.

The Secretary-General has the power to bring to the attention of the Security Council any issue which he feels will threaten the maintaining of international peace. The first meeting of the United Nations Organisation was held in London on 10th January 1946. 31 members participated in this inaugural meeting. The first Secretary-General was Norway's Trygve Lie (1946-1952), succeeded by Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden. The present Secretary-General is Ban Ki Moon of South Korea.

Peace - keeping efforts:-

- * The organisation started functioning by establishing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This led to the control of atomic energy.
- * The first dispute settled by the United Nations Organisation was the removal of the red army which remained in Iran. Russia was forced to withdraw her forces when the Security Council ordered her to do so.
- * When the Egyptian President Abdul Gamal Nassar nationalised the Suez Canal which belonged to Britain and France Israel invaded Egypt. Later England and France attacked Egypt. The U.N.O. settled this issue and prevented the occurrence of another world war.
- * It condemned the apartheid policy (racial segregation and discrimination) in South Africa and ensured that clashes did not occur.
- * Between 1960 - 1970, the U.N.O. assisted the African countries in their movement against imperialism.
- * The U.N.O's special agencies have performed great services to humanity. The Food and Agricultural Association has taken steps to increase food production throughout the world.
- * The World Health Organisation has been successful in eradicating small pox worldwide.

The United Nations Organisation has faced many problems in the discharge of her functions. Some important issues are

- * The division of the world into two power blocs.
(see chapter 5 for more details)
- * Some members of the Security Council often use the veto power, leading to obstruction in the implementation of plans.

Student Activities

- * Explain how far the United Nations Organisation which was formed to maintain world peace has been successful in its functions.
- * Hold a class debate on the topic ‘ The UNO has failed /not failed in the attempt to maintain world peace.

Summary

One of the events of significance in the twentieth century is the division of the countries in the world due to the suspicion and hatred towards one another in their attempt to surpass each other.

- * The occurrence of two such wars,
- * The birth of Fascism and Nazism,
- * These two wars brought about unbearable losses to the world. Two organisations were established to maintain world peace. Of them The League of Nations was unable to fulfil its aim and was therefore unsuccessful.
- * The United Nations Organisation has contributed more towards maintaining peace.
- * The division of the world into two power blocs and the conflict between the two turned into a cold war.